

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL REGIONS BY AGENDA 21 AND THE SITUATION IN SLOVAKIA

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In June 1992 the most extensive document of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) was adopted by the heads of state of the World. It is called Agenda 21. It contains 40 chapters with plenty of recommendations on how to implement sustainable developmental ideas and concepts into practice. In this contribution we want to introduce some of them in connection with the sustainable development of rural regions of Slovakia and neighbouring countries. Another goal is to compare these recommendations with the actual development.

More than one chapter in Agenda 21 deals with sustainable rural development. Chapter 14 - Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development - is especially oriented to this topic. It is stated in this chapter, e.g., that soil erosion, salination, waterlogging, and loss of soil fertility are increasing in all countries. Increased ultraviolet radiation resulting from thinning of the stratospheric ozone layer may also reduce food production. Agriculture has to meet the rising needs mainly by increasing productivity.

Sustainable agriculture and rural development will require major adjustments in agricultural, environmental and economic policies in all countries, and at the international level. This requires cooperation involving rural people, national and local/regional governments, the non-governmental and private sectors as well as the international community.

Techniques for increasing production, reducing food spoilage and loss to pests and for conserving soil and water resources are already available but are not widely or systematically applied. By the turn of the century, governments should have found food policies, based on an awareness of the environmental costs and benefits of various policy choices.

People need advice and training in the use of technologies and farming systems that conserve and rehabilitate land, while increasing production. Both modern and traditional conservation techniques should be used.

Over-use of chemical control of food pests is costly and has adverse effects on human health and the environment. The best option is integrated pest management,

Bemerkung der Herausgeber:

Der Beitrag von M. Huba reagiert auf die Thematik der UNO-Konferenz vom Juni 1992, deren Ergebnis die Annahme des Dokumentes Agenda 21 war. Der Autor weist auf die ersten Beispiele der Implementierung der Prinzipien der nachhaltigen Entwicklung in konzeptionelle Entwicklungspläne bestimmter slowakischer Mikroregionen hin. Sein Beitrag gibt Anregungen für eine komparative Analyse des gegenwärtigen Zustandes dieser außerordentlich dynamischen Problematik.

which combines biological controls, host-plant resistance and appropriate farming practices, to minimize pesticide use.

To keep poor rural population from using marginal lands in an inadequate way, off-farm work such as cottage industries, wildlife utilization, fisheries, village-based light industries and tourism should be developed.

In the Central and East European countries intensity of agriculture was coming down during the last 5 years, but not under pressure of stricter environmental policy or implementation of sustainable development concepts, but mainly under the influence of increases in the price of inputs. In 1991 the Programme of Restoration of the Countryside was adopted by the former Slovak Government, but it has not been systematically implemented yet. In June 1993 an International seminar called Restoration of Rural Landscape - Precondition for Sustainable Development has been held in Nová Bošáca (Slovakia). In conclusions of this event its participants stated inter alia: "The restoration of the ecological stability of the rural landscape and the improvement of economic and social living conditions is one of the elementary preconditions for sustainable development. The development process needs to work at the local, regional, national and European levels." This conclusion is fully consistent with the recommendations of the UNCED.

The following recommendations are made to the central governments and authorities of Slovakia and the Czech Republic, local governments, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), the European Community and other international institutions:

- to create an international program of sustainable management for rural landscapes and economies, focused on comprehensive solutions to environmental, economic, and social problems in the countryside. The program, following-on from existing activities (the Countryside Restoration Program in the Czech Republic), should bring about an appropriate methodology for sustainable farming and rural management, diversified according to specific local conditions and the needs and interests of local inhabitants;
- to gradually implement the program through pilot projects, aiming at sustainable management in specified regions (especially focusing on crossborder regions), where an active interest already exists among the local inhabitants and local government;

One of these projects should be implemented in the White Carpathian region. This represents a typical region with a valuable natural, cultural and historical background, together with problems related to agriculture, water management, transportation, etc. These problems may become more severe subsequent to the division of Czechoslovakia and the creation of a new frontier;

- to devise a comprehensive set of legislative, economic, information, and other tools, supporting a sustainable rural economy. There is a need to decentralize decision-making processes, to increase the role of local self-government, and to increase community finances through an appropriate tax system;

- to establish a working team, consisting of representatives from local and state administration, NGOs, and appropriate experts. The team would coordinate the above mentioned program and would facilitate an effective and flexible exchange of information gained during implementation of pilot projects in the area.

The seminar recommends, to state ministerial bodies and institutions involved in the sphere of economic and financial management:

- *in the sphere of legislative tools:*

- to urgently complete or amend legislation in such a way that it would promote a tendency towards sustainable development of rural landscapes (e.g., Nature Protection and Landscape Management Act, EIA Act in Slovakia, amendment of the Water Resources Act in both republics, etc.);

- *in the sphere of economic tools:*

- appropriate grants, preferential credit and tax relief oriented towards supporting smaller businesses may bring about multiple contributions towards the revitalization of rural communities, creation of new job opportunities, an input of capital and a better use of local potential. These economic tools should respect all the other requirements including environmental ones;
- to provide grants and relief with regard to the universal objectives. For example, support for individual farmers should be connected with promotion of recreational potential, preservation of natural and cultural aesthetic values, and solution of waste issues, etc.;
- to break-down administrative obstacles in order to favour organic agricultural production which will have a positive influence upon the land in addition to public health;
- to devise and implement a system of differential grant policy supporting farming in less productive areas, with regard to the preservation and development of its non-productive functions.

- *in the sphere of organizational tools at the national, regional, and local levels:*

- to approach the rural landscape in a way which will respect local and regional differences (local conditions, architectural variations, attitudes of local inhabitants);
- to regenerate and build-upon the existing traditional values and to use them in a way which will be of benefit to ecological and economic development;
- to implement a system of ecological stability through cooperation between the state administration, local government and other individuals or organizations by which characteristic sub-regions can be managed in a sensitive way within the wider regional context;

- to support a revival of traditional crafts, trade, markets, modes of transport, local and regional culture, in order to strengthen a sound local tradition;
- to revise all questionable past and present plans (economic, environmental and social), incompatible with the concept of sustainable development;
- to re-assess all present plans to interfere with the environment such as land "melioration" (drainage), alterations to watercourses, reservoir constructions, landfills, mining, cutting down trees, construction of roads, demolition of historic buildings, etc. and their compatibility with the concept of sustainable development;
- to initiate discussions, to increase a level of local democracy (participation, collective decision making, mutual solidarity, self-government);
- to support emerging local and regional agencies for sustainable development that have many important potential functions (information, consultation, mediation, implementation);
- to introduce environmental education focusing upon children and local authorities, with the aim of changing attitudes towards sustainable development;
- to initiate the establishment of transboundary association, including state administration. The regional consulting agency is recommended to work for the association. Eventually a group of independent experts from varied professions which are connected with regional issues, will become involved. One of its first activities might be the publication of different aid material for local government agencies, with concrete ideas for village restoration and sustainable management of the rural landscape.

The other positive experiences are connected with the Sub-Tatras Liptov region on both regional and local levels. The agency for sustainable development of the Sub-Tatras region was founded in November 1992 as reaction to the conclusions and recommendations of the International Tatras Conference of Nature Protectors held in Liptovský Hrádok in October 1992. The aim is to stop the Winter Olympic Games preparatory process in this region and enhance activities in favour of sustainable development of the whole region, including: minimalisation of external negative impacts on the Tatras National Parks, safeguarding the optimal functions of the Tatras region, respecting principles of sustainable development concepts, preparing people, and development of tools promoting this kind of development.

The central idea is, that rural tourism is the source of sustainable prosperity for the Sub-Tatras communes.

In the Spis region a Programme of Revitalisation, Restoration and Recovery of Rural Landscape has started. This programme is headed by local authorities in the spirit of the idea of sustainable development. They have organized (in cooperation with the experts and entrepreneurs) seminars and exhibitions dealing with the

mentioned problems. There are also some positive examples of regional and/or local alternative (sustainable) development plans for communes and surrounding rural landscape in various other parts of Slovakia (e.g. Black Hron river region, Ipel' river region, Prešov region, Javorie mountains, the town of Rajec near Žilina, the village of Vištuk near Bratislava and Kvačany in central Liptov, etc.). What is more important, their implementation has started.

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